Chapter 19

An IT Project Management Framework for Assessing the Dynamism of Culture under Globalization:
Evidence from Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Culture has been analysed in information systems (IS) projects as one of the soft issues that cause project failure. Increased outsourcing and collaboration call for an understanding of the dynamism of cultures in the wake of global influences as a first step towards managing cross cultural Information Technology (IT) projects. In this study, the authors propose a way of assessing cultural dynamics in the context of trans-national collaboration in IT projects. Using a mixed methods approach consisting of survey and semi-structured interviews for collecting evidence in Zimbabwe, a framework for assessing the current state of communalist culture is proposed. The study showed that in spite of the inroads of Westernization and Commercialization, a culture of sharing prevails although it is affected by sensitivity to cost burden and inroads of individualism.

INTRODUCTION

The Information Technology Project Manager (ITPM)'s task in supervising multi-cultural collaboration and outsourced projects is complicated by

the risk of working with people of unfamiliar work ethic and communication style. In an increasingly globalized world where offshore markets and outsourcing yield impressive returns on investment, project managers need a clear understanding of

the cultural imperatives that affect trans-cultural collaboration (Dhar & Balakrishnan, 2006). There is a growing body of literature which shows an increased interest in project success in the context of global IT outsourcing (Dhar & Balakrishnan, 2006; Heeks et al., 2001; King & Torkzadeh, 2008; Sahay, Nicholson & Krishna, 2003).

Since the 1980s, Information Systems (IS) research has problematized cultural mismatch in several aspects of software development. This concern was motivated by an awareness of cultural crosspollination taking place under globalization (Illia & Lawson-Body, 2007) and the resultant need to avoid project failure due to mismatches between IS innovation and socio-cutural imperatives (Dada, 2006; Heeks, 2003). Concern with compliance with cultural issues in an increasingly globalized world (Ranf, 2010) has also stimulated interest in organizational and corporate culture (Markus, 1983) as well as the impact of national, societal and ethical culture on IS implementation, usage and social development (Abdul-Gader & Kozar, 1995; Strarub, 1994). This interest was allegedly influenced by cultural sensitivity in organizational and management studies (Li, 2004).

The ground breaking work of Hofstede (1980) is considered to be highly influential to IS researchers. Follow up empirical studies have concluded that culture shapes the values, perceptions, preferred styles of communication, and cognitive and learning styles (Ardichvili, et al., 2006 p.94). In this regard culture has been found to have an impact on design, development, implementation, use and management of information systems (Jones & Alony, 2007; Myers & Tan, 2002). This study focuses on the dynamism of culture with a view to developing a framework for assessing current state of culture for use in the management of IT projects involving collaboration with project teams from collectivist communities.

While other studies have dealt with the media preference across the individualist/collectivist cultural dichotomy, we focus on the impact of Globalization on collectivist cultures. Our focus

on cultural dynamics under globalization is driven by concerns with the danger of assuming that national cultures will remain as they have been stereotyped to be.

Interest in culture has continued to grow with studies addressing information culture in healthcare (Zheng, 2005) cultural communication norms and preferences (Ardichvili, et al., 2006; Dysart-Gale, Pitula, & Radhakrishnan, 2011; Illia & Lawson-Body, 2007) and impact of culture on multi-cultural teams (Richards & Busch, 2009; Walsham, 2001) like outsourcing under globalization (Vogt Beck & Gregory, 2010). This has mainly been addressed in the socially embedded strand of IS research or the situated research traditions which are context sensitive (Avgerou, 2008; Avgerou, 2010).

While the impact of cultural imperatives has been assessed in the context of project success this paper contributes to the debate on the cultural aspects of IT Project Management (ITPM) by proposing a way of assessing the impact of cultural cross pollination under globalization. This is done in order to foster the management of trans-cultural IT projects. We use data collected in the context of a PhD research project on ICT4D in Zimbabwe a country whose rapid socio-economic decline followed by exponential recovery between year 2000 and 2010 is arguably due to its peculiar contextual setting under globalization. We argue that cultural studies in ITPM should go beyond mere cultural sensitivity to the use of methodological frameworks for assessing cultural dynamism. This is done by attempting to answer the following research question: To what extent has the communalist culture of communities in Zimbabwe's eastern region been affected by cultural cross pollination under globalization? Towards that end, the following sub questions are probed:

- How has willingness to share been affected by commercialization and Westernization?

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